

THE GREAT SYMBOL

BY MELVILLE DAVISSON POST.

Presenting an Unusual Story of Service and Its Reward.

TO Marion Dillard there was mockery in the symbolism of the night.

She was alone. On the table before her was an open telegram—her first to the last opening of the year. She was a dark-haired, slender girl with that aspect of capacity and independence with which the great war endowed our women: the high courage that no amount of evil fortune could bludgeon into servility. She sat in her chair before the table, to the eye, unconquered.

It was to the eye only. In the magnificence about the wreckage impaled were, here and there, the grim house fitted with every luxury, the library in which she sat, its rug the treasure of a temple, its walls paneled!

Marion Dillard, in her chair before the table, with the telegram open before her, the whole setting was grotesque. All over the city, white with newly fallen snow, were the symbols of this majestic celebration of the birth of the Savior. The streets were abuzz with life. Holly wreaths hung in the windows, and the strange ivory image representing the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth, which her father had always so greatly prized, had been breached, and after the usual custom of this night, had placed on a table. It sat on a black silk cloth embroidered with a white cross. As a work of art it was not conspicuously excellent; but her father prized it for the needful adventure.

Marion Dillard learned of the chair, reviewing the events that had moved against her as though with some sinister design. Her father was dead. A cross of white marble stood on a bier in France to his memory. And the other, the people in the greater part, for her father, moved by a high, adventurous idealism, too old for longer service in the American Army, had taken his own fortune—and, by some error, the other, the trust, had gone into the common fund. And all the time she came to examine the accounts Marion had endeavored to cover the matter, hoping that the decision of the United States Circuit Court of Appeals would not to recover the trust of coal lands in the South, would be decided in favor of her father's estate, and thus furnish the money to replace this trust. And so she had somehow managed to go on.

This telegram, in her hands, was the sinister words of it. On this night commemorating the birth of that great founder of brotherhood, whose idealistic conceptions her father had always so magnificently followed, she must decide what she would do.

THE thing was sharp and clear before her. She must either wreck the majestic legend of her father, or degrade herself! As she had carried the things along by various shifts since her father's death, she could easily make appear that she herself embezzled this trust fund. That would leave the memory of her father clean; but it really meant that she herself could not escape the criminal courts. The heirs of her father's friend were insistent and hostile. They would have the pound of flesh, now that the fortune was gone.

For a time she sat motionless, her eyes vaguely on the carved ivory image of the Crucifix. Then, she rose up, and with her hands clasped behind her back, stood looking down at the crucifix.

It was about ten inches high, rudely carved in the Chinese fashion out of the segment of an elephant's tusk four inches in diameter. The cross represented the trunk of a tree, the roots thrust out for the base. The figure, with arms extended, was nailed to the broken limbs of this tree trunk. The figure was not upon top of the tree trunk made the head of the figure, thrown back under a crown of thorns. And there in the quaint English letters cut about the base was the legend: "Inasmuch as you have turned your head to save us, may He turn His head to save us."

"So you crawled out of your rat hole, when the column started, to see what you could pinch. Good pickin', eh?"

Col. Swank made a low, murmured exclamation, which told us, he said, "how the rich cities of the country were looted by the soldiery of invading armies; but there can hardly have been a parallel to this in any known case. The whole country for a considerable distance on either side of the line of march was denuded of its wealth, articles of value, and the venerable images of Buddha in the holy Temple of Ten Thousand Ages were broken to pieces with dynamite, under the impression that they concealed articles of value. Of course, the Chinese population concealed their wealth, and the Chinese did not always allow to conceal their articles of value, such as carved ivory, cloisonne, vases, silks, furs and the like."

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